(e) what action Government are taking to ensure fair investigation so that guilty persons are not spared?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) to (e) In 1997, STC's role in urea deal was scrutinized by CBI who after discreet verification have closed the case.

Challenge to Patenting of Basmati

807. SHRI AMAR SINGH: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item appearing in the Economic Times, dated 10th September, 1998, under the caption "Pak ditches India in battle of basmati";

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) what is Government's reaction in regard thereto; and

(d) what are the reasons for not taking any step to challenge the basmati patent granted to U.S. company, Rice Tec. Inc.?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) to (c) The news-item in brief states that "Pakistan has decided not to join forces with India in fighting the basmati patent granted to US company Rice Tec Inc, and instead is challenging it independently in the US Patent Office". According to the available information Pakistan had not filed an appeal against the patent granted to Ricetec. However, Pakistan had formally sent a letter protesting to the US Patent and Trade Mark Office against the grant of the patent to Ricetec and have reserved the right to challenge the issue of the patent.

(d) Patents are granted by respective Governments under their Patents laws. Whenever information is received about patents being taken on certain products which are of commercial interest to India and which in our views do not satisfy the criteria of patentability, steps are taken to assess whether the grant of patent can be challenged. After sufficient material is gathered, steps are taken for filing a petition for re-examination and ultimate revocation of patent in that country.

Export of Onions and Potatoes

808. SHRI SITARAM KESRI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether India has been exporting onions and potatoes;

(b) if so, since when;

(c) whether the import of these items has been lifted;

(d) if so, since when and whether these items have been put under OGL; and

(e) if so, since when and the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. While the exports of onion from India had been taking place even before independence, the exports of potatoes started from 1957-58.

(c) to (e) In order to augment the domestic availability of onion and arrest its rising prices, imports of onion have been freely permitted with effect from 15th October, 1998. As regards import policy for potatoes, these are in the restricted list of imports and can be imported only against a licence or in accordance with public notice issued by the Office of DGFT in this regard.

Textile and Leather Exports

809. SHRI K.M. KHAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether India's textile and leather exports to Germany were hit hard in the first half of calender year 1998;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether Government propose to take some steps ensuring no further downward trend in export of textiles and